

Testimony for the Appropriations Committee

February 24, 2022

My name is Dr. Valerie Wiseman and I am from Avon. I am testifying on the Governor's proposed budget H.B. No. 5037 (COMM) AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2023 that unfortunately does not include critical funding for our safety net providers and their employees.

After decades of underfunding, Connecticut's direct support providers are in crisis mode because the effects of the pandemic have impacted their ability to attract and retain direct care workers and other employees. This staff is critically important to the safety and well-being of many of Connecticut's residents with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD), including my own family.

Our son Glenn lives in a group home and attends a day program, both run by a non-profit organization. Routine and consistency, including consistent staffing, are very important for Glenn. Unfortunately, the agency has, and continues, to experience significant staff shortages and turnover due to their low wage rates. In fact, we just learned today that a staff that has been directly supporting Glenn for over a year and a half, is leaving for a better paying position. This change will have a negative impact on Glenn, both emotionally and behaviorally. We have seen first-hand the important role that these direct support staff play in Glenn's life and others with IDD. It is a shame that people with such an important role need to work at least two jobs just to make a living. They should receive fair and reasonable compensation for what they do. If agencies such as the one providing services to Glenn cannot attract and retain qualified people because of the poor pay, the responsibility for caring for people with IDD will shift to the state, at a much higher cost.

Without your help, our state's community service delivery system will continue to shrink and our loved ones will bear the brunt of this loss. We are already experiencing the worst staffing crisis that service providers have ever seen, which has resulted in an inability to resume programs paused during COVID and caused a rebound effect for family caregivers who are unable to return to work and contribute to Connecticut's economy.

Now more than ever, we need to ensure that critically necessary funding of \$150 million is included in this year's budget for the state's non-profit providers who care for our loved ones on a daily basis. We urge your support and ask that you add this funding to the budget before this committee.

Sincerely,

Dr, Valerie A. Wiseman